

# **THE RETURN TO WORK PRIORITY PROGRAM**

## **Employee Booklet**

State Workers' Compensation Division  
Department of Human Resources Development • State of Hawaii  
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Large Print Version Available - American Disabilities Act Compliant

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# **THE RETURN TO WORK PRIORITY PROGRAM**

State Employees in the Executive Branch who are not working due to an industrial injury will be assisted in returning to work through the Return to Work Priority Program (RTWPP). The RTWPP helps Employees return to work by:

- 1) assignment into light duty tasks and/or
- 2) placement into suitable alternate work.

*Light Duty* may contribute greatly to your recovery. When the physician releases you to light duty, this will be sought first in your department, or if not available, in another department. Your light duty assignment will be approved by a physician and be within your physical and/or psychological restrictions. You will perform these duties until released by a physician to:

- 1) perform additional duties;
- 2) perform regular work or modified work; or
- 3) perform alternate work with placement occurring through Priority Placement.

*Priority Placement* attempts to retain you in State government by placement into alternate work when you are unable to permanently return to your usual and customary work.

A Departmental Meeting held with your Departmental Personnel Office (DPO) will provide you with information about:

1. qualifications for alternate job placement;
2. options of Priority Placement, resignation or retirement;
3. decision making period of 30 calendar days;
4. eligibility period for Priority Placement;
5. departmental job search;
6. statewide job search;
7. appointment to another position;
8. probationary period for the appointment;
9. conditions for termination;
10. vocational rehabilitation services;
11. reemployment rights; and
12. possible consequences of refusal of placement.

You are encouraged to notify your DPO of your decision to participate in Priority Placement or other options as soon as possible. However, you **must** reply no later than 30 calendar days after the Departmental Meeting. Your DPO will notify you of the required documents to submit based on your decision.

## **PARTNERSHIPS**

The success of the Return To Work Priority Program depends upon clear communication between you and your **Departmental Personnel Office(r) (DPO)**. Please provide as much information as possible regarding your work experience, education, skills, hobbies, volunteer work and interests. It is important to keep your DPO informed of your current phone number.

*Based upon this background information and the physician's report on physical and/or psychological capabilities, your DPO will assist with identifying suitable vacancies within your department. If such a vacancy is not readily available, a statewide job search will be conducted.*

Being active in your own job search works in partnership with your DPO's efforts for a successful job placement. It is best to consider as many geographical areas as possible for employment because this increases your likelihood of job placement.

Your DPO will identify possible vacancies based on your physical/psychological capabilities and minimum qualifications. He will communicate with the physician about your capability to perform the duties/responsibilities of the vacancies. If the physician determines that the position is acceptable for you, a meeting with the supervisor will be scheduled.

You must accept the first job offered under this program. The State simply does not have the resources to design multiple positions for you.

Because this effort is a partnership, it is highly recommended that you visit your DPO as well as the **Department of Human Resources Development's (HRD) State Recruiting Office** to review vacancies and to apply for those for which you qualify. If you have a touch-tone telephone, you can call HRD's **JobLink**

computerized State job information system 24-hours every day. It's private, complete and up-to-date. Call **JobLink** anytime at 587-0977. TDD for hearing impaired 587-1148 during regular business hours. (We have included a JobLink brochure to tell you about it.) Applying and qualifying for these positions follow competitive recruiting procedures.

## **QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

### **QUESTION #1**

**Why is my Departmental Personnel Office acting as my “partner” in the Return to Work Priority Program?**

*Your Departmental Personnel Office(r), commonly referred to as DPO, is a very knowledgeable and supportive partner in the Return to Work Priority Program. Your DPO is working on your behalf to find suitable positions because your DPO shares the pride in seeing your talents, expertise and knowledge being placed into active service of helping Hawaii's citizens once again. Your DPO has access to your personnel records and other files, and knows the personnel laws, rules and other guidelines to help make the best recommendation.*

### **QUESTION #2**

**How are my retirement benefits affected?**

*It is recommended that you see a counselor at the State Employees' Retirement System (ERS) of the Department of Budget & Finance. The ERS office in Honolulu is located at the City Financial Tower, 201 Merchant Street, Suite 1400. The telephone number is 586-1735. If you live on the neighbor island, ERS has liaison offices to assist you.*

### **QUESTION #3**

**Must I accept my Light Duty assignment?**

*Yes, you must accept your Light Duty assignment. Much care, expertise and time have gone into assigning the work assignments to best match your capabilities as you begin your return to work.*

*Please remember that the light duty job has been carefully developed by your department and/or the Department of Human Resources Development after in-depth consultation with both a physician and a therapist who have established your capabilities and designed the job duties to meet them.*

*At this point, because your physician has released you to return to work in some capacity, you must accept your Light Duty assignment. If you do not, you will be placed on unauthorized absence from work.*

#### **QUESTION #4**

##### **When does the Eligibility Period begin and end?**

*The Eligibility Period begins with your Departmental Meeting and is a period not to exceed 6 months from the Departmental Meeting. It ends when one of the following occurs: a placement, the completion of one statewide job search, or the 6 month period is up.*

#### **QUESTION #5**

##### **Must I participate in Priority Placement? What may happen if I decline?**

*Participation in Priority Placement is your choice. Priority Placement is the State's way of giving you priority preference, if possible, in alternate work when you are unable to return to your regular work. We will try to place you in a job either within your unit, department, or other departments. Please be aware that this is special treatment, bypassing established civil service recruitment processes. It affects the promotional opportunities and recruitment of civil service employees.*

*As the employer is making extraordinary efforts to get you back on the job, there are consequences if you do not participate in Priority Placement. It is important to emphasize that the Departmental Meeting with your DPO is the critical first step in the return to work process. If you refuse to attend the Departmental Meeting, you will lose your civil service status. Also, if after you have attended your Departmental Meeting to review your options, you do not notify your DPO of your decision to participate in Priority Placement within 30 calendar days, your services with the State will be terminated.*

*For more details on Priority Placement, please seek expert advice from your DPO.*

## **QUESTION #6**

### **What happens if my Priority Placement job doesn't work out?**

*If the job you've been placed in through Priority Placement doesn't work out because of your work injury or illness, you will be assisted with additional placement services for the balance of your eligibility period. If you do not have any remaining eligibility, then your employment will be terminated. You will be referred for vocational rehabilitation services if eligible and you will have reemployment rights.*

## **DEFINITIONS**

**ALTERNATE WORK:** Work, involving a change of the Employee's position, to which a disabled Employee is assigned when they can no longer perform the usual and customary duties and responsibilities of their pre-injury work.

**ELIGIBILITY PERIOD:** A period not to exceed six months. The eligibility period begins with the Departmental Meeting and runs concurrently with the initial 30 calendar days to review options. It ends with a placement or the completion of one statewide job search within the six month period. (For non-regular Employees, the eligibility period shall not exceed the expiration date of their appointment.)

**LIGHT DUTY:** Temporary work that is different from the Employee's usual and customary duties and responsibilities in any department of the Executive Branch. Work is planned/assigned to adhere to the physical and/or psychological restrictions set by the Employee's or Employer's physician. The Employee remains appointed to their current position throughout the entire light duty assignment.

**MODIFIED WORK:** Changes in nonessential or marginal usual and customary duties and/or responsibilities of the Employee's current work.

**REGULAR WORK:** The usual and customary duties and responsibilities of the Employee prior to the workers' compensation injury.

## **DISCLAIMER**

Please note that the information in this booklet does not constitute a legal document or contract. Benefits vary by type of employment appointment, civil service status, and personnel system, and are subject to change. For further information, please contact your Departmental Personnel Office. Information in this booklet may be subject to change. August, 2001 Published by the State of Hawaii Department of Human Resources Development, State Workers' Compensation Division, 13th Floor, 235 South Beretania Street, Honolulu, Hawaii 96813.